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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness of preservice and inservice training in selected interpersonal communication techniques as a way of improving adult educators' ability to communicate with students with a variety of learning styles. The literature on adult learner characteristics and practice, learning style, and concepts and components of interpersonal communication was reviewed to determine the extent to which interpersonal communication techniques facilitate the practice of adult education principles and ways in which individual learning style affects the effectiveness of interpersonal communication techniques. Selected interpersonal communication techniques were analyzed from the standpoint of their appropriateness with adult learners in view of the principles of adult learning. It was concluded that adult educators would definitely benefit from preservice and inservice training in interpersonal communication techniques. The following interpersonal communication techniques were found to be especially effective with adult learners: perception checking, behavioral descriptions, "I" language, paraphrasing, active listening, confirming, win-win negotiating, empathetic communication, nondefensive response, sending change messages, and intercultural communication. (Contains 52 references.) (MN)

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ED 374 209

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADULT LEARNING STYLES AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

A Field Project

Presented to

The Faculty of

Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

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by

Patricia M. Edwards

July 1994

CE 066 993

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ABSTRACT

The faculty for adult education programs is generally drawn from professionals and others with full-time occupations outside the field of education. They have expertise and experience in their subject matter but often lack the ability to adequately present it to adult learners. Students are frustrated because their needs are not met and teachers are frustrated because they feel the communication barrier between themselves and the students.

Adult education teacher training programs offer a myriad of information about adult learning and development, educational philosophy, and attitudes toward adult learners. But teachers still tend to teach in the traditional modes, for lack of the ability and techniques to put theory into practice.

This study addresses these problems by examining some specific techniques which can be used to incorporate adult education theory into practice. Specifically, this study looks at selected interpersonal communication techniques and finds that use of the skills would improve the teacher's ability to operate a class or program in accordance with the Principles of Adult Learning (Lawler, 1991). In addition, the study finds that use of the techniques enhances the teacher's ability to communicate with students with a variety of learning styles.

These findings lead to the conclusion that adult education offerings could be improved by pre-service or in-service training for teachers in interpersonal communication skills.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Instruction inevitably involves communication, whether in a formal learning situation, an informal learning experience, or a self-directed project. The teacher uses language in its various forms to communicate a concept, the parent uses verbal and non-verbal communication to teach a child not to run into the street, the self-directed learner may consult a variety of sources of information to reach the desired learning goal. All are depending on communication skills to complete the teaching/learning process; the teacher must rely on the students' understanding, the parent on the child's, and the self-directed learner on the ability of the writer or consultant to accurately and understandably express concepts and/or instructions.

Students spend years learning to read for meaning and to write comprehensibly. The same attention is rarely given to the skill of speaking, communicating orally. It is often assumed that oral communication is a natural skill; one is born with it or picks it up in the course of daily living. Unfortunately, that is not the case and misunderstood oral communication is disruptive to the educational experience, as well as socially. This is often due to unintended

communication resulting from ignorance of the extent of the communication process. It is impossible not to communicate. People are constantly receiving messages and making judgments about what is heard and seen. Oral communication has two facets, the aural and the visual (often called non-verbal). Words, gestures, facial expression, posture, distance, all provide information to others about thoughts and attitudes. (Adler & Towne, 1993) Research shows that when verbal and non-verbal messages conflict, the hearer will tend to believe the non-verbal message. (Adler & Towne, 1993) The teacher who is unaware of the non-verbal messages being communicated may have problems with student understanding and learning.

Significance of the Study

While reviewing materials for teaching a course in Interpersonal Communication, it struck me that many of the interpersonal communication techniques I was about to teach were precisely the skills I needed in order to effectively teach adults. This led to the larger questions of how adults learn (which has been studied extensively), how teachers teach adults (for which there is a large selection of literature), and how communication style affects learning and teaching.

Malcolm Knowles (1990) has pointed out the changing understanding of

learning which illustrates the need for interpersonal skills. "Intelligence is no longer one-dimensional, but rather includes the notion of multiple intelligences. Each individual is now being thought of as a unique learner with learning preferences and avoidances different from other learners. This means that learning designs must somehow factor in the uniqueness of the individual learner so that the subject matter is understood by all the participants in the learning experience, not only equally in terms of comprehension, but also consistent in terms of intended meaning."

Teachers of adults will find this study of interest as they develop their teaching skills to cope with the expanded view of learning capabilities and the increased need for adult learning opportunities.

Need for the Study

The communication skill most commonly taught to future teachers is public speaking. Most states also require psychology courses, including child psychology. Adult education literature and the characteristics of adult learners makes it clear that public speaking and child psychology are insufficient to prepare teachers of adults. Furthermore, most teachers of adults are not trained or certified as teachers and have not met the most minimal training requirements. (Mocker & Nobel, 1981)

In a proposal for a course in speech communication specifically for teachers, Pamela Cooper (1986) wrote: "In our work with students it may be the quality of our relationship with them, not the content we teach, that is the most significant element determining our effectiveness. We build these relationships through face-to-face communication with our students--through interpersonal communication." Guild and Garger wrote in Marching to Different Drummers (1985) that "clear communications and successful interpersonal relationships are the very core of educational decisions and programs." And Caldwell (1981) listed communication and listening skills as requisites of the competent adult educator. These writers recognize the relational aspect in the teaching/learning situation, relating it to communication skills.

Because of the nature of adult education and the needs of the students, a majority of adult education instructors enter the classroom with substantial subject knowledge and little to no knowledge of or skills in teaching. They tend to resort to the style in which they were taught. But the nature of education is changing rapidly and methods used in the past may no longer be adequate for optimal learning. It is time to break with tradition and explore diverse methods for improving the teaching/learning environment.

Problem Statement

Adults come to the learning situation with a diversity of experience,

motivation, and preferences. Current and future learning is based on the ability of the learner to relate the new learning experiences to prior experiences or current familiar experiences, to experiences created by the teacher to facilitate linkages, and/or to felt meaning and interpretation of past and present experiences. (Tennant, 1991) The measure of success for the teacher of adults is the extent to which (s)he is able to facilitate the informational relationships which allow new material to be retained and given meaning.

This process is complicated by having to deal with students who have different styles of learning, of processing information, of memorization, of finding meaning and making connections. "Individuals differ systematically in their patterns of ability, motivation, cognitive style, and mode of creative expression and these differences have important consequences for the ways in which individuals learn and perform. In addition to consistent individual differences, there are also marked group differences related to sex, ethnicity, and cultural background." (Chickering, 1976) Howard Gardner (1990) has developed a theory of multiple intelligences which identifies at least seven ways in which people learn. Most familiar are linguistically and mathematically, because they are the most common modes used in schooling at all levels. Additionally, Gardner recommends activities based on music, visuals, kinesthetics, interpersonal relationships, and introspection to accommodate individuals who learn better and easier in those modes.

Learning is a private, personal, social-psychological response to a stimulus.

"The impact of an experience depends upon the characteristics of the person who encounters it. When individuals differ, a single experience can have diverse developmental outcomes." (Chickering, 1976) This is why the teacher of adults must be aware of learning orientations, preferences and styles. "The educator's responsibility today is to adapt instruction to the individual learner--to seek an optimal match between the individual's characteristics and the characteristics of alternative possible educational environments." (Snow, 1976)

The problem is that "most adult education programs depend on a cadre of part-time adult education teachers. Characteristically, these teachers are diverse, mobile, and responsive; they have the appropriate subject matter expertise, but many do not have training in the educational techniques specific to adult populations. By virtue of their background, they have not acquired the instructional competencies needed to provide the highest-quality educational experiences for adult learners." (Mocker & Noble, 1981) Even trained teachers may lack specific skills for translating theory into practice.

Therefore, this study is designed to determine the extent to which skill in interpersonal communication techniques can enhance the learning atmosphere and improve the relationship between teacher and student. The research questions are:

RQ1: To what extent do interpersonal communication techniques facilitate the practice of adult education principles?

RQ2: How does individual learning style affect the effectiveness of

interpersonal communication techniques?

Limitations of the Study

This is an exploratory study and, as such, does not presume to either define or report experimental data. The report is descriptive and even the prescriptive actions suggested are based not on observed usage, but on analysis and comparison.

Studies of adults and learning are limited in their usefulness due to class and culture biases in the test design, uncontrollable variables, and problems with finding (or even describing) a representative sample. Because of this, much of what we believe about adults and adult learning is extrapolated from studies in other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, management, youth education, geriatrics, and communication.

Definition of Terms

There are many definitions of what constitutes adulthood. Biologically, it's when we become able to reproduce. Legally, it's a set chronological age, determined by law. Socially, it's taking on the responsibilities of adult living, holding a job, living on one's own, raising a family, etc. Psychologically, it refers

to development of self concept and self determination. (Knowles, 1990) For the purposes of this study the age will be set at 24, when most people can be expected to fulfill Malcolm Knowles' four criteria.

While acknowledging, as reported by Knowles (1990), Brookfield (1986), Cross (1981), and Tough (1979), that adult learning takes place more often outside the classroom and unassisted by a trained teacher, for the purposes of this study (since it deals with teaching improvement), adult education is defined as formal, teacher-assisted learning for persons over the age of 23. It is to be distinguished from training only to the extent that training is defined as a prescribed performance regimen permitting no deviation.

Interpersonal communication is defined as a transactional process for exchange of meaning. (Pearson & Spitzberg) The various aspects of the process are defined and discussed as part of the data collection and findings.

Learning styles "represent consistencies in the manner or form of cognition, as distinct from the content of cognition or the level of skill displayed in the cognitive performance. They are conceptualized as stable attitudes, preferences, or habitual strategies determining a person's typical modes of perceiving, remembering, thinking, and problem solving." (Messick, 1976) For the purposes of this study, the term learning style refers only to cognitive learning orientations and preferences. In this regard orientation is considered to be social and psychological factors affecting the learning process and preferences are to be operational strategies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study the literature review has been designated as part of the data collection. There are, however, some points to be made at this time. Throughout adult education literature reference is made to the importance of language and communication in the teaching/learning process. "Teaching is vastly facilitated by the medium of language, which ends by being not only the medium for exchange but the instrument that the learner can then use himself in bringing order into the environment." (Bruner, 1966)

Teacher preparation programs always include courses in writing (the ability to read by that point being assumed) and sometimes include courses in public speaking and instructional communication. Often, however, the competencies are poorly defined or the standards are loose enough to be meaningless.

> Knowledge of what constitutes appropriate and effective communication is often ignored outside of the speech communication discipline. Many feel that skill demonstration automatically means that students know why they are performing as they do. One recent study has found that students may evidence effective skills without awareness or understanding of principles involved. It is important that teachers understand the principles behind their communication behavior to demonstrate effective communication appropriate to the setting. (Rubin & Feezel, 1986)

Western Washington University requires one communication course for teacher certification. All the choices listed focus on speaking skills--clarity, delivery, vocalization, persuasiveness, etc. But effective communication, for a teacher, involves relationships. "Abilities to carry on effective interpersonal relationships with others, to speak clearly and concisely, to lead and interact in group environments, and to listen with understanding and empathy are most important for all teachers." (Rubin & Feezel, 1986)

Merriam and Caffarella (1991) explain the importance of understanding adult education as a "social activity. It involves people and their interactions with one another--people who have differing views on how things should be done, who feel obligated and responsible in different ways." As in any social activity, communication is of utmost importance. The adult educator must be an accomplished communicator for, no matter what the students' preferred style of learning, the majority of teaching tasks are communication-based. (Cooper, 1986) "Teachers spend much of their time in communication activities. They speak and lecture to classes and listen and interact interpersonally with students, colleagues, parents, administrators, and the public." (Rubin & Feezel, 1986)

Janice Schuetz (1981) describes the competent communicator as "adaptable, flexible, and sensitive to the demands of other persons and of different situational contexts." She maintains that "when teachers possess these attributes they increase their capability for dealing with a wide variety of learners and educational contexts." This "wide variety of learners and educational contexts" is

typical for adult educators.

The Instructional Communication Program at the University of Washington has two core assumptions: that teachers must be content specialists, firmly grounded in the subject matter they are to teach, and that teachers must be competent communicators, possessing both knowledge of, and skill in, the communication process. (Staton, 1989) Michael Tennant (1991) makes the same point in his article on the psychology of adult teaching and learning, "The expertise of the teacher of adults lies solely in mastery of the subject matter and teaching skill. They have no life experiences beyond that of the students and may even have less. Teacher and students are peers in this sense."

It would appear from the literature that skill in communication is related to knowledge and practice. Teachers at all levels must be good communicators, but it is particularly important in the teaching of adults because of the diversity of experience, personality, goals, and prior education. While platform speaking skills are important, the social nature of adult education makes it even more important for the adult educator to have interpersonal communication skills.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory study to determine if the literature will support the perception of congruence between interpersonal communication techniques and adult teaching/learning. Collection of data is focussed in three areas: adult learner characteristics, learning styles, and interpersonal communication techniques. It involves a review of adult education literature, specifically the areas of adult learner characteristics and current practice. The field of psychology provides data on current thinking about personality types and learning styles. These ideas are widely accepted in the field of education, as well as the fields of sociology and management. The field of communication was explored for specific interpersonal and instructional techniques applicable to classroom use which enhance and build on principles of adult learning.

Analysis of the data deals with the relationships between the three areas of inquiry: assessing the extent to which interpersonal communication techniques embody the principles of adult learning and how interpersonal communication techniques affect and are affected by individual learning and teaching styles.

Implications for practice in adult education are included.

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION

Adult learner characteristics and practice

Many surveys and studies have been conducted in an attempt to describe the adult learner. In general, they show that participants in adult education are more likely to be younger, have more education, be employed full time in white-collar jobs, with above average income, live in the suburbs, and in the West. They are more likely to be women than men. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991) The age range of more than fifty years presents us with continuing developmental changes and the broad spectrum of adult learning possibilities corresponds to a wide variation in adult learner characteristics. "Adults who take part in literacy or job-training programs are very different from those who engage in part-time study in universities, and these differ even further from the 'average' participant." (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991) Also, one must take into consideration the very different forms of adult education--piano instruction as compared to physics or job safety, for example.

A basic premise of andragogy--the art and science of helping adults learn--is that adults are self-directing beings. Malcolm Knowles (1970) expresses it

eloquently:

> A child first sees himself as a completely dependent personality. He sees himself in his first consciousness as being completely dependent upon the adult world, to make his decisions for him, to feed him, to change his diapers, and to see where the pin is sticking. During the course of his childhood and youth that dependence is reinforced as decisions are made for him, in the home, school, in church, on the playground, and everywhere he turns. But at some point he starts experiencing the joy of deciding things for himself...To be adult means to be self-directing. Now at the point at which this change occurs there develops in the human being a deep psychological need to be perceived by himself and by others as being indeed self-directing. This is the concept that lies at the heart of andragogy. Andragogy is based upon the insight that the deepest need in adults is to be treated as an adult, to be treated as a self-directing person, to be treated with respect.

There is some disagreement as to whether self-direction is actually an integral component of adulthood. Personality type has a great deal to do with how one acts and reacts to life situations. Dependency seems to be a preferred mode of operation for some people, especially in certain types of situations. It may also be a be a cultural expectation in some circumstances. J. R. Kidd (1977) writes about this dichotomy in How Adults Learn.

> The learner has two opposite needs, dependence and independence. He wants to lean on the parent or teacher or foreman or coach, to be guided by him. He would like to have the hard tasks done by someone else. At the same time, he wants to assert himself. He is fed up with being a yes-man, he wants to dominate, to have people know that he is quite a person. Sometimes one of these opposing tendencies is stronger, sometimes the other, but both are always present. The learner who understands that he has such counterpoised drives is already in a better position to bring them into some kind of equilibrium.

Stephen Brookfield (1986) points out that while adults do operate with a degree of independence which differentiates them from children, the notion of

self-directedness as a generalized description of adult learning is based on faulty assumptions and research with culture and class biases. Most of this research has been done with white, middle class students and other adults with higher than average education. To apply the results to all adults could be very misleading.

There are two ways of looking at the issue of self-directedness. On the one hand, some adult educators emphasize the control issue. They would define self-directed learning as a situation in which the goals, method, and evaluation are controlled by the learner. Self-directedness is a learned skill enabling the learner to plan and evaluate a course of learning. This is based on the assumption of a psychological need for self-direction and control. On the other hand adult educators such as Brookfield and Mezirow would contend that self-direction is a result of shedding the constraints of social, cultural, and psychological assumptions governing learners' lives so they can be more aware of needs and open to alternatives. (Tennant, 1991) It is not so much a skill as a state of mind.

For practitioners, the decision between these two views relates to the role of the teacher. In the first understanding of self-direction, the teacher assists the learner in developing the strategies for learning, mastering the techniques and procedures. The second view puts the teacher in the role of catalyst and challenger. The learner still makes decisions about the learning process, but those decisions are made "after consideration of all possibilities, based on sufficient knowledge, understanding, and skills of communication." (Strong, 1977) Brookfield (1986) points out that this is "not simply equivalent to learner control

over goals and methods of learning, since such control can be exercised without a full knowledge of alternative learning goals and possible learning activities."

Whichever philosophical position is taken on this issue, the fact remains that self-direction can be considered at least a goal of adulthood. Carl Rogers (1942), writing of his clinical experiences, said "I find that the urge for a great degree of independence, the desire for a self-determined integration, the tendency to strive, even through much pain, toward a socialized maturity, is as strong as--no, is stronger than--the desire for a comfortable dependence, the need to rely upon external authority for assurance."

A facet of adulthood which has no argument is that of experience. Experience in adults has a different effect on education than in children and youth. For one thing, adults have more and different experiences. Those experiences can be incorporated as part of the learning experience and used as a resource. Also, the need to gain understanding of life experiences serves as a catalyst for learning, and the adult integration of experience with learning involves modification, transference, and reintegration of meaning, values strategies and skills rather than just formation and accumulation. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991)

Some adult educators point to experience as the motivation for entering into a learning opportunity. "Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy." (Knowles, 1990) The motivation to learn often comes as a result of a life change, such as marriage, divorce, children, career changes, retirement, death, moving to another part of the country, etc.

(Zemke & Zemke, 1981) Aslanian and Brickell (1980) found that 83% of adult learners could point to a transitional event which triggered the desire or need for education.

The effect of experience on education is also related to one's socioeconomic experiences. "Adult learning does not occur in a vacuum. What one needs or wants to learn, what opportunities are available, the manner in which one learns--all are to a large extent determined by the society in which one lives." (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991) When one needs to make sense of one's experiences or attempt to direct future experiences, the natural inclination is to learn about the situation and relate the information to past knowledge and experiences in order to integrate the meaning and understand the implications. Sometimes this takes the form of self-directed learning, but often it involves looking to others for assistance in developing understanding.

A third function of experience in adult education is as a resource for learning. Because adults have such a rich reservoir of experiences, they have a ready source of examples illustrating concepts and problems which can be used to develop opinions, values, and knowledge. Experience is also an advantage to adults as they continue to learn and explains the research statistics on adult education participants being better educated than most. "The adult with more education has learned how to learn; he approaches a new situation with a learning strategy in his mind, and he expects to be able to learn." (Zahn, 1967) This positive reinforcement encourages the learner to search for more education, more

learning experiences, both formal and informal. On the other hand, experience can hinder the educational process if previously learned knowledge seriously conflicts with the information to be learned or if prior learning experiences have been negative or unsuccessful. (Cross, 1981; Zahn, 1967; Zemke & Zemke, 1981)

Abraham Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs relating to human motivation. The five-step process begins with gratification of biological needs and moves toward self-actualization as the highest level of development and motivation. His contention is that "man must satisfy his basic biological needs before higher order social needs will emerge." (Kidd, 1977) What this means in understanding adult learners is that until the need for food, housing, safety, and acceptance have been fulfilled, the individual may not be able to understand, care about, or concentrate on larger social, moral, and educational issues. At the same time, education may be a key to fulfillment of basic needs. Cross (1981) points out that "extrinsic rewards such as better jobs and more pay appear to dictate subject matter interests until basic needs for security and recognition are met." Studies of interest in education repeatedly show that the strongest barrier for the poorly educated is lack of interest. (Cross, 1981) Frank Riessman (1962) interprets the research as evidence that education is perceived differently by the poorly educated:

> There is practically no interest in knowledge for its own sake; quite the contrary, a pragmatic antiintellectualism prevails. Nor is education seen as an opportunity for the development of self-expression, self-realization, growth, and the like. The average deprived person is interested in education in terms of how useful and practical it can be to him.

In this country schooling is mandatory for all children up to a certain grade or age. But "change is now so great and so far reaching that no amount of education during youth can prepare adults to meet the demands that will be made on them." (Cross, 1981) This illustrates the need for lifelong learning opportunities. These opportunities, for the most part, are voluntary. Though there are mandatory continuing education requirements for some professions and some employers require upgrade and continuing training, most adult education is undertaken by choice. This means that participation can be withdrawn if the learner needs are not met or if the learner is threatened by the situation. Kenneth Howard (1989) has developed an Expectancy Motivation model. The model shows the relationship between motivation and perceived or expected benefit and has implications for teaching and retention, since it insures that learning has a practical value for the participant. Patricia Cross (1981) has a similar conception of adult learning in her Chain of Response model. This model demonstrates the relationship between self-confidence and the risk-taking involved in a new learning situation.

> Those with low self-confidence in their learning abilities will avoid the risk required in learning new things, basically because they do not expect to succeed....Those most likely to feel threatened in school learning situations (those who leave school early) are more likely to participate in low-threat than in high-threat learning activities....The hypothesis of threat learners are willing and able to tolerate is a strong argument for support of the full range of learning options, emphasizing low threat options as good entry points for adults with low levels of self-esteem....*Other things being equal*, however, adults with high self-evaluations are likely to participate in whatever form of education meets their needs, whereas those with low self-confidence are limited by a need to

protect themselves from the threat of further failure.

Youth education is basically preparatory. Students are in training for their roles as adults and learning is their main occupation. Adults typically add education to their other activities. Learning arises from the context of their lives and is characterized by its immediate applicability to their duties and responsibilities. (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991) There are two important points here: that adult learning is "problem-centered" and that adult learners expect to be able to use the new information or skills immediately.

Alan Tough (1971) concludes from his research on self-directed learning that "most adult learning begins because of a problem or responsibility, or at least a question or puzzle, not because of a grand desire for a liberal education." Malcolm Knowles (1978) identifies this problem-centered orientation to learning as one of the basic assumptions of adult learning:

> Children have been conditioned to have a subject-centered orientation to most learning, whereas adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning. This difference is primarily the result of the difference in time perspective. The child's time perspective toward learning is one of postponed application.
>
> The adult, on the other hand, comes into an educational activity largely because he is experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current life problems. He wants to apply tomorrow what he learns today, so his time perspective is one of immediacy of application.

Put another way, children tend to look at education as the accumulation of knowledge while adults think of learning as a way of becoming more effective in their lives. Therefore adults expect practical application of the knowledge.

Even in this respect, however, there is a great variation in what adults are looking for in their education. For some it means an actual problem. They will gain the knowledge or skill to solve the problem and go on to other things. For others, the social aspect of the learning experience is more important than the knowledge or skills, as for example, the newcomer to town who takes a course because it's a good place to meet people, or the housewife who needs to get out of the house and be with people.

Beder and Darkenwald (1982) reported a study of data from teachers who taught both adults and pre-adults and concluded that "adults are perceived as more motivated, pragmatic, self-directed, and task-oriented than pre-adults." J. C. Zahn (1967), looking at differences between adults and youth, concluded that adults "are more expressive, more expansive and more outgoing. The high anxiety of youth is moderated by greater feelings of autonomy, of competence, and of stability." Patricia Cross (1981) found that "on the average, older learners perceive more slowly, think more slowly, and act more slowly than younger people." Kowalski (1984) summarized adult learner differences with a list: "a) motivation [higher], b) physical speed [lower], c) personality [more fixed behavior], d) vision and hearing [regressive], e) independence [greater freedom than children], f) expectations [desire self-directed learning, demand high levels of relevance]." And Malcolm Knowles (1990) points out that "individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning."

Learning Style

A great deal of research has been done, and is continuing, on learner typology. Though each researcher generates his or her own terms, we can see a pattern beginning to develop. Learners fit along a number of continua dealing with their attitudes toward the purpose for learning, need for security, tendency for action, imagination, and interpersonal relationships.

Cyril Houle (1961) groups learners according to three orientations: goal oriented, activity oriented, and learning oriented. The orientation to learning affects, and is affected by, the student's motivation to learn. According to Houle, goal oriented learners use learning to achieve specific objectives. Learning is a series of discrete episodes, each beginning with the identification of a need. Activity oriented learners, on the other hand, participate primarily for the sake of the activity, the subject matter is less important than the socialization available. Finally, the learning oriented learners undertake learning for its own sake. It is part of a lifelong development and growth process.

Another way of looking at learning orientation is to consider personality type. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Keirsey-Bates Temperament Sorter are perhaps the best known tools for assessing an individual's predominant style of processing information. Both yield 16 basic type combinations based on individual preferences on continua between introversion and extraversion, sensing and intuiting, thinking and feeling, and judging and perceiving.

Other researchers have identified more comprehensive learning styles. Kolb distinguished four styles of processing information: the converger, whose strength is practical application; the diverger, who is strongest in imaginative abilities; the assimilator, who is good at theoretical models; and the accommodator, whose strength is adaptive application. (Krahe, 1993) Ward based his learning style profiles on Kolb's work and describes four styles: idealistic, pragmatic, realistic, and existentialistic. The idealistic are independent thinkers and reasoners. They resent restrictive, structured, instructor-centered training programs and appreciate self-paced learning, group discussion, self appraisal and evaluation, goal setting, and collegial interaction. Pragmatic learners must be convinced of the applicability of the approach, technique, or methodology. They tend to have difficulty transferring skills from one setting to another and learn best with hands-on experience and training designed to their situations. The realistic types are direct and efficient, but they may lack interpersonal skills. Structure and programmed instruction with explicit goals and well-defined outcomes appeal to this group. Existentialistic learners are constantly exploring options because they believe there is no one right or best way. Sensitivity, respect, and human relations activities are appreciated and they learn best with inductive reasoning. There should be clearly defined outcomes and expectations, while permitting the to learner determine specific strategy for accomplishing objectives. (Sakata, 1984)

Another way to classify learners is based on their approach to the learning

situation. This is determined both by psychological factors and activity preferences. Endorf and McNeff (1991) have separated learners into five types: a) Confident, pragmatic, goal-oriented learners are self-sufficient, introspective and self-directed, in competition with themselves. Their learning style is interactive and experiential. They prepare well for class and expect others to do same. b) Affective learners are eager students who enjoy being with like-minded adults, like the feeling of school, and traditional relationships with faculty. The professor is seen as the source of knowledge, wisdom, and expertise. Learning is an end in itself. They may feel initial apprehension which recedes with familiarity. They willingly cooperate with teachers' plans. c) Learners-in-transition are developing independence as students. School is seen as part of changes in their lives, so they want to know how to use their learning, to connect it to their experience and needs. They are pragmatic in their approach to learning and feel a sense of equality with their professors, who may be looked on as mentors. They like discussion and interactive learning. d) Integrated learners see life and career as integrated. They are interested in personal success, in control, and feel a sense of freedom in knowing the techniques for academic success. They prefer a peer-like relationship with their professors and consider learning to be their own responsibility. They are self-directed. Learning inspires them to do more. They like to contribute to the learning process, feeling that school is more than a means to reach a new career goal. e) Risk takers are willing to change routines and schedules, and enjoy new ventures. They are willing to work hard to

succeed, but are easily distracted from the stated goal if interesting new learning is available in a different direction. They are self-confident, eschew support groups, and look to the professor for learning and guidance.

Learning styles have another dimension, the preferred or habitual strategies for learning. Every person has preferred ways of organizing the information (s)he encounters which are more or less unique to him or her. Cognitive, or learning, styles refer to the individual's consistent ways of receiving, processing, and storing information. These styles are distinct from content or level of skill. They are attitudinal, preferences, or habitual strategies for perceiving, remembering, thinking and problem solving. (Messick, 1976) Many social scientists and educators over the years have attempted to categorize and define these learning styles in order to provide assistance to teachers as they deal with individual student differences.

The simplest breakdown of learning style is differentiating between field dependence and field independence. This differentiation is characterized by the scope of the individual's view of the problem. The field dependent person tends to see things as a whole and may have a problem distinguishing the parts making up the whole. Socialization is important to the field dependent and relationships have high priority. The field independent person tends to be analytical, aware of all the various parts of the whole, but less comfortable with the total effect than with the individual parts. The field dependent person needs "stronger triggers" to distinguish the different parts while the field independent person needs more

assistance in putting the parts together to see the whole. (Chickering, 1976)

Stephen Brookfield (1986) synthesized Witkin's characterization of field dependent/independent learners:

> Field independent learners are analytical, socially independent, inner-directed, individualistic, and possessed of a strong sense of self-identity. Field dependent learners, in contrast, are extrinsically oriented, responsive to external reinforcement, aware of context, view things holistically, and are cognizant of the effects that their learning has on others.

Field dependence or independence has not been shown to have any relationship to intelligence or maturity. Nor should it be viewed as an either/or situation. It is a continuum from one extreme to the other with all possibilities in between. There are, however, studies showing gender and culture biases. "Men tend to exhibit interests in areas requiring analytic skills....Women tend to prefer activities that involve dealing with people." (Witkin, 1976) However, Witkin also points out that socialization factors are strong influences in the "development of individual differences in field dependence versus field independence."

In addition to the field dependence/independence categorization, we can look at learning styles in physiological terms. "40% of us are visual learners, 40% are kinesthetic/tactile learners, 15% are auditory, and about 5% mostly use our olfactory/gustatory attributes" (Johnson, 1994) The Canfield Learning Styles Inventory (Canfield & Knight, 1983) calls this the learning "mode", listing four discrete modes: listening, reading, iconic (viewing illustrations, movies, pictures, graphs, etc.), and direct experience (handling or performing, practice, etc.). The most commonly used mode in formal education is reading; second is listening.

The Canfield Learning Styles Inventory includes two other sets of variables in the assessment of learning styles: conditions and content. Conditions include such preference ranges as group work, course organization, goal setting, competition, instructor relationship, details, independence, and authority. Content involves working with four areas of learning--numbers and logic, words and language, things, and people.

Familiarity with the various typologies and their characteristics allows a teacher to serve students better. "Conventional school settings predominantly address the learning style of the Introverted-Intuitive-Thinking-Judging pupil. The opposite of this type, however, the Extroverted, Sensing-Feeling-Perception individual, is at high risk in an academic milieu....Classroom instruction, however, which addresses the various learning styles of students increases the chances of scholastic success for all learners." (Van, 1992) Even without testing each student to determine type, knowledge of type characteristics can help a teacher plan class activities which will tap into the strengths of all the students in one way or another.

Researchers differ on the degree to which learning orientation and preferences are innate as opposed to learned. Witkin (1976) finds definite trends related to socialization in his studies of field dependent and field independent learners. Even those who claim that learning styles are innate and do not change will admit that an individual must experiment to find his or her preferred style, and different challenges may call for the development of different styles.

(Lawrence, 1982)

While it is unreasonable to expect a teacher to know each student's personal learning style, it is helpful for teachers of adults to have a working familiarity with learning style theory and characteristics. "When learning style preferences are taken into account, learner achievement and satisfaction have been shown to increase. Although much of this research has not involved adults, the usefulness of learning-style diagnosis for vocational and continuing education has been clearly demonstrated in practice." (Penland, 1984) One thing the teacher of adults can count on is that there will be great diversity in the class. The presence of this diversity requires the ability to use a variety of class activities to accommodate the different learning styles present. This is an ability which must be developed, because, just as students have different learning styles, so do teachers have different teaching styles, often based on their own learning styles. "Most teachers are visual learners. They like to read books and other publications and expect their students to do likewise....College professors, obviously, expect students to be auditory learners." (Johnson, 1994) In a similar vein, Witkin (1976) found that "relatively field dependent teachers have been found to prefer a discussion method of teaching to the lecturing or discovery methods preferred by relatively field independent teachers" and "relatively field dependent teachers have a more favorable attitude toward the use of democratic classroom procedures than do field independent teachers."

Research has found that although field dependent and field independent

teachers have different approaches, they do not differ in competence, based on student feedback. Nevertheless, "teacher and students who were matched in cognitive styles liked each other more than mismatched teachers and students." (Penland, 1984) There are good reasons for this; Witkin (1976) lists three: a shared basis for their interests, shared personal characteristics, and similarity of communication modes. Opinions are mixed, however, about the advisability of matching teaching and learning styles. On the one hand, the compatibility occasioned by matching styles eliminates communication and personality differences which can be barriers to learning for a person of the opposite style. But there's always the danger that this very compatibility can become too comfortable and students will not be challenged to consider alternative views and methods.

The desirability of matching or mismatching student and teacher styles varies as a function of many things, including a) the developmental level of the learner--the higher the developmental level, the more benefit from matching, b) the subject matter--the more highly structured the subject, the more benefit from matching, c) the surrounding context--both psychological and environmental factors such as the availability of materials and technology, and d) the goals of the educational experience--the more individualized the goal, the greater benefit from matching. (Messick, 1976)

Concepts of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication can be defined as "the process of transaction between people from which meaning is mutually derived." (Pearson & Spitzberg, 1990) Understanding the nature of the process necessitates awareness of the characteristics of interpersonal communication.

First, it begins with the self: perceptions, experiences, self-concept, expectations, preferences, and fears. Barnlund (1970) found six perspectives involved in every communication situation: a) how one views oneself, b) how one views the other, c) how one believes the other views one, d) how the other views the self, e) how the other views one, and f) how the other believes one views him or her. This suggests many permutations of the directions communication may take. The teacher of adults must understand the implications of this characteristic. First, that whatever (s)he says is shaped by these six perspectives, and then that each student will understand and respond according to how the message is received within the context of their own set of perspectives.

Second, interpersonal communication is transactional. It is an on-going process dependent on both parties to it. Communication occurs even without words. Messages are sent simultaneously and continuously, defining the overt message and the relationship. This leads to the third characteristic, that interpersonal communication involves both content and relational aspects.

A fourth aspect of interpersonal communication relates to feedback, which is essential to the completion of communication. Interpersonal communication

assumes immediate and complete feedback through aural, visual, and sensual messages. This characteristic is often related to proximity, which facilitates the ability to see, hear, and feel the reactions of the hearer.

Interpersonal communication implies interdependence. The communicators are dependent on each other for the furtherance of their needs and understanding of the issues and perspectives.

Finally, interpersonal communication is neither reversible nor repeatable. Each message, verbal or non-verbal, affects the relationship of sender and recipient, effectively blocking any change to, or repetition of, previous communication. Denials and retractions can be made, but the relationship is already changed by the original message.

Normally interpersonal communication is considered to be dyadic, one-to-one. On the surface, this would seem to exclude classroom teaching from consideration as an interpersonal communication situation. However, the literature shows that teaching adults is not simply a matter of relating to groups; there is a strong element of one-on-one interaction in almost any teaching situation. Furthermore, adult education literature stresses the individuality of the student and the need to deal with each student personally, taking into account specific needs and styles of learning. This study identifies six areas in which specific interpersonal communication techniques may enhance teacher/student relationships and contribute to student success.

Components of Interpersonal Communication

A study of 134 students in basic speech communication courses in an evening and weekend program at the University of Maryland identified the communication skills they felt were most important for work and in family and social life. Listening skills led both lists. Other skills deemed important included expressing feelings, building relationships, informal conversations, resolving conflicts, and self disclosure. (Wolvin, 1984) This study examines six interpersonal communication components inherent in the teaching/learning process, perception, language, listening, confirming, conflict management, and intercultural challenges, to determine specific skills applicable to teaching adults.

Perception--Perceptions are shaped by the communicator's background and responses to Barnlund's six perspectives. These perceptions can be barriers to effective communication if the assumption is made that others have similar perspectives. This is not always true, and the differences in perception can lead to conflict of varying degrees. Words can have different meanings in different contexts but, without clarification, each party tends to assume the other holds a similar perspective to his/her own and proceeds accordingly, believing they have understood one another.

Non-verbal messages can produce even more confusion. Assumptions are made about people and their character based on observation of such non-verbal messages as a person's dressing style, stance and walk, vocal sound, body

orientation, eye contact, facial expressions. The danger is that all of these non-verbal messages are ambiguous and can lead to inaccurate conclusions about others' feelings and motives. If a student frowns during a teacher's lecture, is it because the student disagrees with the teacher? People have a tendency to want reasons, explanations, so they create reasons and explanations based on their own experience and proceed as if their creations were fact.

The first step in the interpersonal communication technique known as **perception checking** is to recognize that any observed action may have a variety of reasons. The frowning student may indeed disagree; but the student may be lost, not able to keep up. On the other hand, the frown may have nothing to do with class. The student may be thinking about family or job, or even how hard it is to stay awake. The only way to determine the real reason for the frown is to ask, specifically describing the behavior leading to the question and offering at least two possible interpretations. "I notice you're frowning. Did I say something wrong or am I going too fast?" This gives the other person the opportunity to share, leading to open communication and understanding. In addition, as Adler and Towne (1993) point out, "it minimizes defensiveness by preserving the other person's face. Instead of saying in effect 'I know what you're thinking...' a perception check takes the more respectful approach that states or implies 'I know I'm not qualified to judge you without some help.'"

Language--The language component of interpersonal communication has

two aspects: clarity and responsibility. The first refers to the need for clear language to promote understanding. Misunderstandings occur for many reasons and are inevitable unless the communicator consciously strives to give clear messages and clarify received messages. Language itself is unclear for several reasons: a) words are symbolic and arbitrary, meaning what the individual believes them to mean; b) words can have more than one meaning, accruing specific meaning from context; c) language is governed by rules, but the rules are inconsistent. As if that weren't enough, people use language inappropriately, speaking ambiguously or abstractly, distorting meaning through word choice, using incorrect words due to different perspectives, confusing facts and inferences, playing on emotions with labels and 'trigger' words.

To clarify messages, the communicator needs to be careful in word choices, explaining or avoiding ambiguous and relative words, distinguish fact from inference, clarify through definitions, examples, and comparison, repeat and paraphrase for understanding, and practice descriptiveness. This last is an important interpersonal communication technique. It means to describe observable behavior or characteristics without offering an evaluation or judgment. **Behavioral descriptions** have three parts: a) Who is involved? Is it the self, an entire category of people (women, men, salespeople, teachers, administrators), a sub-group (attractive women, men teachers, boy-crazy girls), or a specific person? b) In what circumstances? Behaviors rarely happen all the time. What circumstances set this situation apart? and c) What are the specific behaviors?

Behaviors must be observable, preferably to all observers, and quantifiable (e.g. *three times in the last week*, instead of *always*).

The second language component of interpersonal communication is responsibility. This is the ability to own emotions, to take responsibility for feelings. It manifests itself in the way feelings are discussed. There are two ways to handle dissatisfaction with others: confrontation ("I wish you wouldn't be so critical!" "You didn't keep your promise!") or a description of feelings and reactions to the speaker's words or actions without labeling or judging.

This latter is an interpersonal communication technique called **"I" Language**. The technique has three parts; it describes a) the other person's behavior (see behavioral descriptions, above), b) the speaker's personal feelings, and c) the consequences the other person's behavior has on the speaker. For example: "When you don't do your homework (behavior) I get frustrated (feelings) because I have to work harder to get you up to speed with the class or slow the rest of the class down (consequences)." Advantages to the use of "I" language include defense reduction because the emphasis is on the speaker's feelings rather than the hearer's misdemeanors, increased honesty with its resultant improved feelings of self-worth, and completeness, because the "I" statement gives more information than a judgmental accusation.

Listening--Wolvin's (1984) students ranked listening as the most important communication skill for both work and family/social life. They also felt that

listening was already their best skill. This is rarely the case. People often confuse listening with hearing. Hearing is an involuntary action involving the reception of sound waves. Listening is a selective activity involving concentrated attention to the message demonstrated by appropriate feedback.

All communication is subject to interference which acts as a barrier to understanding. This interference can be other sounds, but is more disruptive when it is internal--preoccupation with self, thinking ahead, emotions, preconceptions about the speaker, lack of interest. The message itself can provide barriers to effective listening when there are factual distortions, emotional labels, criticisms, etc. With so many possible barriers to effective listening it becomes obvious that listening is work, requiring training and practice.

Listening requires active participation in the process. An interpersonal communication technique for assuring concentration and understanding is **paraphrasing** the message, using different words to express the same basic thoughts and feelings. It is an objective, non-evaluative restatement of what the listener thinks the speaker meant. This gives the speaker the opportunity to clarify points that have not been understood, as well as to clarify the points in his/her own mind. One must be careful not to color the paraphrase with one's own values and attitudes or to attempt to lead the speaker. The paraphrase should be tentative, inviting affirmation or correction from the speaker.

Active listening requires listening empathetically, from the speaker's point of view, and responding to the speaker's needs, not one's own. Paraphrasing can

be used here to reflect back the feelings expressed. Sometimes the speaker has mixed feelings. Asking questions about mixed messages can assist the speaker in sorting out his/her true feelings and clarifying needs. Sometimes self-disclosure of similar experiences and feelings helps to affirm the personal worth of the speaker and resolve issues. Again, the response must be non-judgmental and non-directive.

Active listening means listening for total meaning. Sometimes the speaker will approach a problem in an oblique manner. If the listener responds only to the initial message, the real problem may never come up. One must be aware of inconsistencies in words and manner and do some perception checking. It's also important to listen for the parts of the message the speaker may be too shy, embarrassed or angry to express. Every message has both content and relational aspects and the response must encompass both. Perception checking, paraphrasing, and questioning can be used effectively to facilitate full communication and understanding.

Confirming--"What makes a communication climate positive or negative?...The answer is surprisingly simple. The tone of a relationship is shaped by the degree to which the people believe themselves to be valued by one another." (Adler & Towne, 1993) **Confirming messages** are one way to show others they are valued. Confirming communication has three levels: recognition, acknowledgment, and endorsement. Recognition is the basic level of response,

verbal or non-verbal, e.g. eye contact, saying "Hi", waving, making some kind of contact demonstrating to the other person that their presence is noted and appreciated. The acknowledgement level is a stronger form of affirmation. Here the other's ideas and feelings are acknowledged. It involves active listening, paraphrasing, asking questions, responding. The highest level is endorsement, which implies agreement. This does not have to mean total agreement in order to endorse another's message. Points of agreement or understanding can be found, for example to agree another has reason to be angry even though the resultant actions may be a point of disagreement. Praise is strong form of endorsement.

Conflict management--Conflict can occur between teacher and student and between students. It can be a positive experience if it is used to examine a problem and work toward a solution. This doesn't happen, however, when individuals take the opportunity to attack, arousing defense mechanisms which cause the conflict to escalate. The research of Jack Gibb (1961) gives us six communication behaviors for reducing the possibility of triggering defense mechanisms: behavioral description, problem orientation, sincerity and honesty, empathy, equality, and provisionalism.

Behavioral description focuses on observed behavior and the speaker's thoughts and feelings instead of judging and accusing the listener. This technique forces the speaker to ascertain the underlying problem and gives the listener more information to which to respond. Because it is non-evaluative, the listener doesn't

feel threatened and can respond to the stated problem.

The technique of problem orientation focuses on finding a solution which will satisfy the needs of persons on both sides of the conflict situation. This is often called a **Win-Win skill**. It's a negotiation. To make it work, both sides must agree to cooperate and prepare themselves for it. This is not generally a spontaneous response to a problem. It involves problem identification and determination of unmet needs, behavioral description, self-disclosure, empathy, brainstorming, and a sincere desire to have both sides win.

Sincerity and honesty may not defuse a conflict situation or achieve the desired end, but at least defense mechanisms will not be roused due to the listener feeling disconfirmed by fraud and deceit.

"Gibb has found that empathy helps rid communication of the quality of indifference." (Adler & Towne, 1993) Indifference can be very disconfirming because it communicates a lack of concern for the other and implies that person is valueless. This promotes defensiveness because people don't like others to think of them as worthless and they will go to extreme lengths to protect the image they present to the world. **Empathetic communication** is supportive, understanding, accepting, and respectful. It is also difficult to achieve when there are misunderstandings and disagreements. Adler and Towne (1993) offer a five-step formula for building empathy and understanding. a) I'm Right, You're Wrong--This is the position people normally take in a conflict situation. b) You're Right, I'm Wrong--At this point the individuals switch perspectives and try

to determine the good points of the other's position and find flaws in their own. c) Both Right, Both Wrong--This position involves accepting that there is good on both sides and error on both sides. This is also the point to acknowledge commonalities. d) The Issue Isn't As Important As It Seems--This is the point to acknowledge that the issue isn't critical and negotiation and compromises can be made. e) There Is Truth In All Four of the Previous Positions--Once the issue has been considered from all angles it is likely that understanding will be gained which, though it may not resolve the immediate issue, will increase tolerance for the other's point of view thereby improving the communication climate.

The dichotomy of superiority vs. equality is similar to indifference vs. empathy. The superior attitude conveys a feeling of worthlessness to the recipient and the antidote is recognition that everyone has his/her own talents, which are every bit as important as one's own.

Provisionalism is the name Gibb (1961) gives to the communication response to combat certainty. Like superiority, certainty conveys a lack of regard for others in its disdain for their views. Provisionalism recognizes that people can hold strong views and yet be willing to acknowledge they don't know everything and others may know something which will put a different light on their beliefs. It accepts the possibility the other person may be right.

There are also specific interpersonal communication techniques applicable to criticism directed toward the teacher which are designed to defuse tensions and identify problems and solutions. A **non-defensive response** may include one or

both of these steps: a) Seek more information--It's difficult to respond constructively to an attack without understanding the full import of the other person's criticism. Also, even in what seems a totally unjustified attack there may be a grain of truth. Ask for specifics. If the accuser is unable, or unwilling, to articulate specifics, help him/her out by offering suggestions. Paraphrase what the accuser says and request clarification. Ask what the critic wants to happen and how (s)he is affected by the behavior in question. b) Agree with the critic--Sometimes one can agree with the criticism, that it is valid and change should be made. It is not even necessary to agree with the entire charge to constructively use this technique. One can select parts of the criticism to agree with and go from there. The fact that one is willing to listen and accept even part of the criticism will send a confirming message, allowing the critic to continue the discussion rationally. But, how does one agree with comments one feels are completely untrue? What if all the facts have been ascertained and one still cannot find anything about which to agree? A constructive, confirming message can still be sent--agree with the critic's right to see things his/her way. This avoids debates over who is right and wrong while preserving each person's right to choose their own beliefs and actions.

One final technique for conflict management provides a format for sending **change messages** without triggering defense mechanisms. The technique has five parts: behavioral description--observable and non-judgmental; interpretation--offered separately from the description of behavior; feeling--making sure it is a

feeling and not interpretation or intention; consequence--to explain what happens as a result of the behavior, interpretation, feeling, or all three; and intention--a position statement, request, or description of future actions.

Intercultural--Given the ease with which misunderstandings occur within a single language and culture, it is easy to imagine the greater harm that can be done between languages and cultures. "Differences in the way language is used and the very world view that a language creates makes communicating across cultures a challenging task." (Adler & Towne, 1993) The increasing interaction with peoples from all over the world increases the need for skill in intercultural communication. Many of the skills and techniques detailed above provide a basis for communicating with people of other cultures. The first step, however, is to become familiar with the common misconceptions which lead to communication barriers. Knowing what to watch for may help avoid the mistakes.

Ignoring differences--This barrier occurs due to the assumption that underneath everyone is alike. But this is not true. Aspects of each culture affect attitudes, beliefs, and values in different ways. The assumption that everyone is basically alike conveys a superior attitude and is disconfirming to anyone with different, but equally legitimate, values and beliefs. The differences must be recognized and valued while seeking out and emphasizing similarities.

Ignoring differences within groups--Within every cultural group there are subgroups with significant differences. Because there is a tendency to stereotype

and label, people are lumped into groups according to artificial distinctions. Each individual must be accepted and appreciated for his/her distinctive talents and personality, rather than treated as a representative or specimen of the 'group'.

Ignoring meaning differences in verbal and non-verbal messages--Words and gestures are but symbols for meaning, and symbols have different meaning in different contexts and circumstances. Taking the symbols of one's culture for granted leads to a kind of superior ethnocentricity and miscommunication ranging from humorous to insulting. Awareness of one's audience is essential in order to fit the language and gestures to the situation.

Evaluating differences negatively--Ethnocentric thinking is a trap, evaluating one's own culture positively and other cultures negatively. Recognize that all cultural customs and rules are arbitrary, neither natural nor logical.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The two problems for this study are:

RQ1: To what extent do interpersonal communication techniques facilitate the practice of adult education principles?

RQ2: How does individual learning style affect the effectiveness of interpersonal communication techniques?

Findings related to these problems are presented in three sections. In the first section, data related to adult learner characteristics and principles is presented. The second section presents interpersonal communication techniques and compares them to the adult learning principles. The third section presents data on learning styles and compares it with interpersonal communication techniques.

Adult Learner Characteristics and Principles

There is tremendous diversity in adult learners due to many factors including, but not limited to, age, socioeconomic status, motivation, experience,

level of competence, and expectations. A recognition of this diversity is essential for the teacher of adults to meet the needs of the adult learner. Patricia Lawler's (1991) "Principles of Adult Learning" incorporate the most common adult learner characteristics and needs into a single list.

Table 1. Principles of Adult Learning

PRINCIPLE	DEFINITION	INDICATORS
Adult education requires a physical and social climate of respect.	An environment which affords participants a physical and social climate conducive to adult learning.	● Room, furniture, and equipment suitable for participants. ● Physical amenities known and made available. ● Evident respect for students, encouraging participation. ● Feedback is constructive, descriptive, and non-judgmental.
A collaborative mode of learning is central to adult education.	The involvement of participants, facilitators, and administrators in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the learning experience.	● Participants, facilitators, and administrators participate in needs assessment and appropriate program design. ● Participants and facilitators are equally involved in decision-making, setting expectations, and conducting negotiations concerning program implementation. ● Evaluation of the program is completed by the participants, facilitators, and administrators.
Adult education includes and builds on the experience of the participant.	Learning which takes into account the participant's past and present experience.	● Opportunities are provided for the participants to utilize, integrate, and reflect on their experience in relation to what is being learned. ● Problem-solving and problem posing are linked to the participants' on-the-job and life needs. ● The instructional process is geared to the experience level of the participant.
Adult education fosters critical reflective thinking.	Learning which involves the examination and questioning of information, values, beliefs, and experience.	● Open mindedness is communicated; facilitator is willing to accept critical feedback and to allow opposing ideas, opinions, or feelings; participants should demonstrate the same willingness during group discussion. ● Facilitator and participants acknowledge content contradictions. ● Program design and implementation encourage participants to challenge content. ● A program philosophy is proposed and is open to analysis and change.
Problem posing and problem solving are fundamental aspects of adult education.	Learning which involves examination of issues and concerns, transforms content into problem situations, and necessitates analysis and development of solutions.	● Activities include utilizing real life problems and concerns of the participants. ● Activities and discussion encourage participants to identify problems in program content. ● Facilitator encourages questioning in an environment that accepts a multiplicity of resolutions. ● Opportunities are provided to relate learning to current issues and concerns.

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Table 1--Continued

Learning for action is valued in adult education.	Learning in which the participant comprehends a situation, takes action, actually or hypothetically, in that situation, reflects on the result, and is then able to apply the insight gained to subsequent situations.	● Problem solving methodology incorporates experiential techniques such as case studies, simulations, role plays, and supervised practice. ● Activities encourage learner participation in the identification of options and considerations of the anticipated results. ● Participant and group self-evaluation ability and readiness to apply new learning in their own environments. ● Facilitator and participants create a supportive environment in which experimentation can take place. ● Dialogue occurs regarding the contextual appropriateness of the learning experience.
Adult education is best facilitated in a participative environment.	Learning climate encourages and facilitates active interchange of ideas, content, and experience, and actively involves each participant.	● Participants are involved in program design and evaluation. ● Interchange of roles between facilitator and participants. ● Expression of different ideas and opinions by participants and facilitator is welcomed. ● Use of experiential activities, such as group discussions and exercises is evident.
Adult education empowers the participant.	Learning which facilitates an awareness that one possesses the means to influence or change his or her environment.	● Opportunity for participants to change the direction and content of a course or session. ● Role exchange--participants with the facilitator and with each other. ● Participants are encouraged to use their experience as a basis for problem solving. ● Evaluation includes examination of personal growth and opportunity for continued growth. ● Program planning includes organizational commitment to change.
Self-directed learning is encouraged and enhanced in adult education.	Learning in which the participant initiates and/or controls the learning process.	● Participants are involved in the program design (including objectives, content, scheduling, and evaluation). ● Activities encourage self-directedness in the classroom (learning contracts, self-evaluation, independent study, establishing social networks, participant sharing of materials and experiences). ● Activities encourage self-directed learning outside the classroom.

(Lawler, 1991)

Concepts of growth in adult education literature assume that individuals can change and grow throughout their adult life and that growth is positive in the sense that it promotes self awareness, a more accurate perception of reality, or increased power and responsibility. (Tennant, 1991) All of the principles listed above focus on the concept of growth. While there is disagreement among adult

educators regarding the innate qualities of adulthood in terms of these principles, the common sentiment is that growth in these areas is expected from adult education programs.

One point to note is that often the adult learner does not consciously realize the importance of or desire for education in accordance with these principles. The expected method is the traditional method and new teaching/learning techniques can be both frightening and liberating.

Interpersonal Communication Techniques

The Interpersonal Communication Techniques were selected for inclusion in this study based on the following criteria:

1. They are skills, with steps, which can be practiced to competency.
2. The techniques can be used in group settings as well as dyads.
3. The steps can be modified and adjusted to deal with a variety of situations and styles.

The techniques, their definitions, steps, and anticipated results are presented in Table 2, which was developed by the author with source data from Adler and Towne (1993), Pearson and Spitzberg (1990), and DeVito (1993).

Table 2. Interpersonal Communication Techniques

TECHNIQUE	DEFINITION	STEPS	RESULTS
Perception Checking	Verification of the accuracy of interpretations.	**Recognize** that any observed action may have a variety of reasons. **Describe** observed behavior. **Offer** at least two interpretations. **Request** confirmation or clarification of interpretations.	Respect for the individual's feelings and sense of self. Understanding of different personality and activity styles.
Behavioral Descriptions	Description of observable behavior or characteristics without evaluation or judgment.	**Who** is involved? In **what** circumstances? (**When?**) **What** are the specific behaviors?	Clear communication. Adequate information.
"I" Language	Description of speaker's reaction to another's behaviors without making judgments.	Describe **other's** behavior. Describe **personal** feelings. Describe personal **consequences** of the behavior.	Defense reduction. Increased honesty. Improved self worth. Completeness.
Paraphrasing	An objective, non-evaluative restatement of what the listener thinks the speaker meant.	**Express** the same thoughts and feelings in different words. **Invite** affirmation or correction from the speaker.	Gives opportunity to clarify and explain.
Active Listening	Means of eliciting additional information to promote understanding.	**Listen** with empathy and for unspoken needs. **Clarify** mixed messages. **Paraphrase** for understanding. **Check** perceptions.	Helps the speaker sort out feelings and needs without superimposing listener's values on the speaker.
Confirming	A message that expresses value and respect for the other.	**Recognition** of existence/presence. **Acknowledgment** of other's ideas and feelings. **Endorsement** of part or all of other's message.	Improves relationships because the participants feel valued.
Win-Win Negotiating	Focus on finding a solution which will satisfy the needs on both sides of a conflict.	**Identify** problem and/or unmet needs. **Describe** problem behavior. **Share** desired result. **Consider** other person's problem/needs. **Brainstorm** ways to satisfy both sides.	Satisfactory result. Improved relationship. Open communications.

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Table 2--Continued

Empathetic Communication	Ability to project self into another's point of view in order to experience the thoughts and feelings supporting it.	**Determine** positive aspects of own point of view, negative aspects of the other. **Determine** positive aspects of the other point of view, negative aspects of own. **Accept** that each point of view has both positive and negative aspects. **Acknowledge** that the issue isn't critical and compromises can be made. Use new understandings gained from previous steps to **work out problem**.	Understanding is gained which increases tolerance for the other's point of view, thereby improving the communication climate.
Non-defensive Response	Method of response to criticism designed to defuse tensions and identify problems and solutions.	**Seek** more information: Ask for specifics. Paraphrase criticism. Ask for desired solution. **Agree** with critic: Agree with the truth. Agree with critic's right to see things his/her way.	Accepting and agreeing with even part of the criticism sends a confirming message and reduces tensions so the problem can be discussed rationally.
Sending Change Messages	Strategy for communicating dissatisfaction without arousing defense mechanisms.	**Behavioral** description. Give possible **interpretation**. Share **feelings**. Explain **consequences**. State **intentions**.	Improved communication climate. Better possibility of satisfactory response.
Intercultural Communication	Communication between persons of different cultures or persons who have different values, beliefs, or ways of behaving.	Recognize and **value** the differences. **Accept** people as unique and valuable individuals. **Fit** language and gestures to the **listener**. Recognize that customs and rules are **arbitrary**.	Creates atmosphere that encourages development of full potential and enriches the learning experiences of all the students.

Comparison of Interpersonal Communication Techniques and Adult Learning Principles

The first question for the study was: "To what extent do interpersonal communication techniques facilitate the practice of adult education principles?" To answer this question, the data in Tables 1 and 2 were compared. Each principle listed in Table 1 was compared with techniques listed in Table 2 to

determine the extent to which the technique could facilitate fulfillment of the principle. The results follow.

Principle 1--Physical and Social Climate of Respect

Because adult education is generally a voluntary commitment, there is a tendency for adults to terminate participation in uncomfortable learning situations. Comfort is both a physical and psychological factor. Crowded rooms that are too hot or too cold, impersonal teaching techniques or teaching which ignores the learning style and preferences of the student, adverse personal situations all contribute to dropping out, physically or psychologically. Matching learning and teaching styles increases the comfort factor but may lack stimulus. Teachers experienced in interpersonal communication skills will use clear language techniques and perception checking to promote understanding, and conflict management techniques to generate discussion without raising defensiveness, allowing students to express themselves while respecting the feelings and beliefs of others.

Respect is especially important when teaching adults. Education is a small part of their lives. They have a right to expect the same respect from a teacher that they get from friends and associates. Perception checking acknowledges that people are different and permits the teacher to understand and adjust to students' learning styles.

Successful intercultural communication is based on respect and acceptance.

In Marching to Different Drummers Guild and Garger (1985) wrote: "Knowing that people see different things helps us to communicate with more depth. Knowing that people have different beliefs and values helps to understand the various interests and needs of a diverse school population. Accepting the diversity of style can help us to create the atmosphere and experiences that encourage each individual to reach his or her full potential." This is also true of interactions within a culturally pluralistic society. When teachers are open to the differences of the various cultural groups, the learning experiences of all the students are enriched.

Principle 2--Collaborative Mode of Learning

When teachers use the Win-Win technique to allow students to assist in planning the course or program, students and teacher will be more satisfied with the results. In addition, students will have a greater stake in the success of their learning endeavor than if the teacher did all the planning. Most students have no experience planning their learning, so this principle requires not a little effort on the teacher's part to achieve. The Win-Win technique is a practical plan for implementation.

Principle 3--Use and Build on Experience of Participant

Experience affects the learner's attitude toward learning, perception process, learning style, and integration of new information. The adult educator is

advised to incorporate the students' pertinent experiences into the learning process while assisting them to broaden their experiences through learning. Perception checking can help a teacher tap into a student's experiences while active listening provides encouragement and support for sharing the experiences. At the same time, confirming attitudes and actions develop trust between teacher and student to increase sharing. Immigration and increasing study abroad means that teachers are more likely than not to have international students in their classes. Patience and sincere concern can result in valuable learning experiences for all class members as different cultural perspectives and experiences are applied to subject matter and discussions.

Principle 4--Critical Reflective Thinking

Critical thinking involves challenges to the norm. Trust must be generated and demonstrated for opposing views to be expressed and challenged. Ideally, even teacher opinions are fair game for challenge. Teachers who can respond non-defensively to criticism and challenge are better prepared to assist members of the discussion to allay their defense mechanisms and discuss issues rationally. Other interpersonal communication techniques which can be used constructively to implement this principle include empathetic communication and paraphrasing.

Principle 5--Problem Posing and Problem Solving

No one interpersonal communication technique can be identified to

facilitate implementation of this principle. In various circumstances, any or all of the techniques studied may be helpful.

Principle 6--Learning for Action

Adults expect learning to be practical and to be able to use it immediately. They are past the preparation phase of their lives into the productive phase. Accomplishments are counted and results expected. They enter learning situations with differing motives in terms of the expected results, they attack the learning from different orientations and with different styles of operation, but there is always some expectation of result. The perceptive adult educator can exploit this expectation to enhance the learning process through judicious use of the techniques listed under the interpersonal communication techniques of perception checking, behavioral description, paraphrasing, active listening, and confirming. In looking at student motivation and goals, the teacher must be aware of the individual nature of the learning process and able to relate to the student on an individual level in order to reinforce each student's strengths.

Principle 7--Participative Environment

There are a number of factors which contribute to a participative environment. Many of them would fit under the heading of confirming messages. Eye contact is conducive to participation and is a confirming message. Room arrangement sends a message to the students. Teachers of adults often arrange

chairs in a circle to encourage communication, not just between teacher and student, but between students as well. This is a confirming message. Studies have shown the inhibiting effect of rows of chairs where students speak to the back of other students' heads. (Kidd, 1977) The desire to send a confirming message is also an impelling reason for teachers to leave the safety of their podiums and join the class where they and the students can receive more complete feedback, leading to more effective communication and improved learning.

"I" Language is particularly appropriate for use with adults because they tend to be more responsible and amenable to reasonable requests, and want to understand the purpose for a specific task. (Beder & Darkenwald, 1982; Knowles, 1990) The completeness of the "I" statement allows the hearer to respond to the concern rather than having to defend against the hostility of an accusation, providing the basis for rational discussion of the real issue.

> Effective communication involves giving messages and accepting and respecting the messages of others. Practitioners can establish a model for this kind of collaborative communication by asking questions, using clarification, listening empathetically, giving frequent and appropriate feedback, encouraging learners to take turns at responding and talking, discouraging interruptions, and participating fully themselves in the communicative exchange. (Schuetz, 1981)

Principle 8--Empowerment

The teacher who wishes to empower his/her students will cultivate the art of active listening. Empowerment implies taking control, trusting and acting on one's own feelings and values. But, as Kidd (1977) points out, students are torn

between reliance on self and dependence on the teacher. They look to the teacher for answers. One way for the teacher to assist the student with education that empowers is to use paraphrasing and questioning to force the student to develop his or her own line of thinking and action based on his or her own experiences and knowledge.

Principle 9--Self-direction

Adult education literature emphasizes the individuality of adult students and the need for adult educators to guide them toward self-direction. Holding and communicating the goal of learner self-direction is a strong confirming message. Active listening and empathy are the most important aspects of the confirming process.

Studies have shown that approximately 29% of the waking day is spent listening. Students average 57% of their time in listening, and interpersonal communication can involve the communicator in listening as much as 66% of the time. (Pearson & Spitzberg, 1990) Teachers who truly want their adult students to be self-directing must become skilled at active listening and learn to let the student lead.

> The value of the basic communication skills mentioned above may be self-evident; yet, these skills are so often absent from our day-to-day interactions. For the person who is hoping to promote greater learner self-direction, these skills can help to foster a positive, growth-oriented relationship. Further, if used appropriately, the skills should be able to help learners more clearly and confidently explore their roles as learners and, hence, to take increasingly greater personal responsibility for their learning. (Brockett, 1991)

Learning Styles

Learning styles selected for consideration in this study are representative of the findings in the field. The orientations and preferences listed in Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate the variety of styles identified and are used in this study to illustrate the efficacy of interpersonal communication techniques with all learning styles. No attempt has been made to correlate or group the various styles. Tables 3 and 4 were developed by the author from source data noted internally.

Table 3. Learning Orientation

Houle (1961)	**Kolb** (Krahe, 1993)	**Myers-Briggs Type Indicator** (Myers & Myers, 1987)	
Goal-oriented	Converger	ISTJ	INFJ
Activity-oriented	Diverger	ISTP	INFP
Learning-oriented	Assimilator	ESTP	ENFP
Endorf/McNeff (1991)	Accommodator	ESTJ	ENFJ
Confident	**Ward** (Sakata, 1984)	ISFJ	INTJ
Affective	Idealistic	ISFP	INTP
Transitional	Pragmatic	ESFP	ENTP
Integrated	Realistic	ESFJ	ENTJ
Risk-takers	Existentialistic	I = Introversion, E = Extraversion, S = Sensing, N = Intuition, T = Thinking, F = Feeling, J = Judging, P = Perceiving	

Table 4. Learning Preferences

Witkin (1976)	**Canfield** (Canfield & Knight, 1983)	**Gardner** (1990)
Field dependent	Listening	Linguistic
Field Independent	Reading	Mathematic
Johnson (1994)	Iconic	Music
Visual	Experiential	Visual
Kinesthetic/Tactile		Kinesthetic
Auditory		Interpersonal
Olfactory/Gustatory		Intrapersonal

The second research question was "How does individual learning style affect the effectiveness of interpersonal communication techniques?" The answer was derived from a comparison of Table 2 with Tables 3 and 4.

Table 2 shows the interpersonal communication techniques and anticipated results. The techniques have specific steps, but they are open-ended in their applicability. They are not limited to a particular personality type or learning style. Because they are designed to offer and elicit as much information as possible, they can be used with all types and ages.

Studies have shown that the teacher and student with similar styles tend to communicate easily and share a mutual respect and liking. Skills in interpersonal communication techniques may have no effect on this already satisfactory situation. The most improvement is likely to be seen when the teacher and student have different styles and the teacher is familiar with learning style theory

and skilled in interpersonal communication techniques.

The only real limitation style poses on application of the interpersonal communication techniques is that some techniques will be more comfortable for some people to execute. For example, the introverted field independent mathematician may have difficulty developing the ability to keep probing to get to the heart of a student's real needs and desires.

Guild and Garger note in Marching to Different Drummers (1985), "It may not be as important to know exactly the style of each person we interact with as it is to act upon the assumption that in any group of people a diversity of styles will be represented." They suggest that knowledge of other styles leads to a change in teacher behavior--not a change in basic beliefs or philosophy--in order to facilitate positive communication.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The faculty for adult education programs is generally drawn from professionals and others with full-time occupations outside the field of education. They have expertise and experience in their subject matter but often lack the ability to adequately present it to adult learners. Students are frustrated because their needs are not met and teachers are frustrated because they feel the communication barrier between themselves and the students.

Adult education teacher training programs offer a myriad of information about adult learning and development, educational philosophy, and attitudes toward adult learners. But teachers still tend to teach in the traditional modes, for lack of the ability and techniques to put theory into practice.

This study addresses these problems by examining some specific techniques which can be used to incorporate adult education theory into practice. Specifically, this study looks at selected interpersonal communication techniques and finds that use of the skills would improve the teacher's ability to operate a class or program in accordance with the Principles of Adult Learning (Lawler, 1991). In addition, the study finds that use of the techniques enhances the

teacher's ability to communicate with students with a variety of learning styles.

These findings lead to the conclusion that adult education offerings could be improved by pre-service or in-service training for teachers in interpersonal communication skills.

Discussion

"Instructional communication is defined typically as the study of the human communication process as it occurs in instructional contexts--across subject matter, grade levels, and types of settings. The focus is on communication variables that can or do affect all instructional environments (e.g. teacher power, nonverbal immediacy, teacher communicator style)." (Staton, 1989) Power, immediacy and style--all are important factors in the instructional process. All are factors regarding which the teacher of adults must make decisions.

Adult education literature advises us that power should be shared with our adult students, and that the teacher of adults should use his or her power to empower the students. Teachers enter the learning environment with an assumption of power as a given part of their role. Students have been conditioned by their prior education to view the teacher in an authoritarian role. This is a contradiction for adults, who may find themselves in a quandary between their need for self-determination and their desire for comfortable dependence.

How the teacher of adults uses his or her power to respond to student needs sets a tone in the classroom which influences student motivation, satisfaction, and, ultimately, learning.

The importance of nonverbal immediacy (or feedback) in the learning situation cannot be overstated, as it relates to acceptance of the student, and acceptance is closely related to the psychological comfort factor, which affects motivation and retention. This has important implications for teachers in a normal classroom, e.g. room arrangement, proximity to students, etc., and is a growing topic of concern as we enter the video age. Interactive video networks are already in operation. Teachers must now consider carefully how to verbally and non-verbally convey that important sense of contact and togetherness to students at distant locations who are connected only via fiber optics.

Style is, in many ways, directly related to control. The teacher sets the style for the class and bears the responsibility for taking the initiative in matters of style. Additionally, the teacher should not only know his or her own style, but also the effect it has on students with other styles.

> As a person with a strong thinking pattern, for example, I have to know that some people see me as too attentive to detail, too bogged down in nitty-gritty facts, and as very slow to come to decisions. While I value my accuracy and exactness, another person may see me as being extremely fastidious and picayune. While I value my thorough planning, another person may see me as being rigid. While I value my objectivity and control over emotion, another person may see me as cold and impersonal. (Guild & Garger, 1985)

Regular use of interpersonal communication techniques stimulates a sensitivity to other styles and provides a variety of techniques to facilitate positive

communication in diverse situations.

One of the benefits of using interpersonal communication techniques in the adult classroom is that it allows, even encourages, great flexibility. When students feel free to give critical feedback and express opposing ideas, opinions or feelings, the level of ownership of the learning is heightened, with a resulting higher probability of learning. The teacher who is able to non-defensively respond to criticism and to guide discussions, challenging student input for depth without offending and raising defensiveness, will find personal challenge and enthusiasm from the student responses.

Impact on Current Practice

The impact of this study is reflected in current practices related to teacher preparedness, the role of the teacher, and implementation of theory.

Teacher Preparedness

A thorough grasp of interpersonal communication techniques will give teachers a variety of options from which to choose the most appropriate to the situation. Adult students are unique individuals and teachers must be able to work with that individuality. Similar situations may require dissimilar techniques due to differences in personality and learning style. Teachers need a clear knowledge of, and sensitivity to, personality and learning styles so they can select

the most effective communication skills for managing a given situation.

> When the intuitive learner asks a tangential question, the teacher should understand how to respond. When the sensing learner asks for a practical example, the teacher should understand that student's need. Teachers need to ask both general and specific questions. They need to provide opportunities for the extraverted student to act while thinking and for the introverted student to think before acting. When teachers give assignments, they should include auditory, visual, and kinesthetic tasks. (Guild & Garger, 1985)

Interpersonal communication skills are learned. They must be practiced to make them natural. This skill development should be a part of every teacher's preparation and regularly reviewed and renewed. Gorham (1984) suggests training teachers in techniques especially suitable for adult students, based on findings in a survey offering some evidence that training teachers in techniques is more conducive to effective practice than "training which is directed toward instilling desired attitudes toward adult learners."

Knowledge of adult characteristics and needs is important in that it helps teachers of adults recognize the differences between adult and youth learning styles and needs. Equally important is methodology for implementing that knowledge. This study establishes the connections between adult learning theory and the specific skills to put it into practice. If the two pieces were taught together as a set of core competencies for adult education, teachers would exit their training programs with improved skills for entering the classroom.

Role of the Teacher

Technology is changing American education. Children at the lowest grades

are beginning to learn about computers and to operate them. Interactive computer programs allow students to delve into many diverse aspects of a subject, utilizing and enhancing many of the "intelligences" identified by Howard Gardner, allowing students to learn at their own pace and in their own style. The focus is shifting from teacher to learner. "The teaching/learning process is facilitated by promoting CAI [Computer Assisted Instruction] which emphasizes student productivity and ability rather than teacher productivity." (Ewing et al, 1986) How, then, does the teacher fit into the learning experience? What function will the teacher serve when the computer can transmit more information so much better and faster?

A careful examination of the Principles of Adult Learning (Lawler, 1991), presented in Table 1 in Chapter 5, shows that no teacher functions have been usurped by the computer, because the role of the teacher of adults is relational, not content oriented. Since the teacher's role is relational, the value of interpersonal communication skills is evident.

Furthermore, if each student is accepted as a unique individual, it becomes easier to focus on the individual's strengths and design learning experiences which will capitalize on those strengths. Gardner's (1990) theory of multiple intelligences becomes more useful, and the relationship between teacher and student equalizes. The teacher's role changes from fount of all knowledge to mentor, advisor, facilitator. Group process and relationships become more important than transmission of facts. The student may learn facts from the

computer, but meaning is more than facts, and meaning comes from seeing the relationship of facts to experience. This is the new role of the teacher. The success of the teacher in helping the student attach meaning to facts depends on communication proficiency.

Teacher evaluation would also become more pertinent and useful if there were specific skills to be evaluated and improved, if necessary. Setting up interpersonal communication techniques based on adult learning principles as the core competencies of adult education would provide a foundation for growth and development of teaching and class planning skills.

Implementing Theory

Adult educators need more than theory. They need specific skills to help translate theory into practice. They need skills-based pre-service and in-service training. They need support for skills training and good practice from administration.

Adult education literature points up dramatically how little research and theory gets translated into practice. Beder and Darkenwald (1982) conducted a study of teachers who taught both youth and adults. They found that these teachers perceive significant differences between the two groups and report that there are significant differences in their teaching behaviors between the two groups. However, Gorham (1984, 1985) went a step further, actually observing teachers who reported significant differences. She found that overall, the use of

directive teacher behavior was essentially the same with both preadults and adults. In fact, she found that teachers with formal training in adult education were less likely to have a student-centered approach to teaching.

In 1977, J. R. Kidd pointed out the proven advantages of face-to-face communication possible with circular or u-shaped arrangements of chairs and the inhibiting effect of rows of chairs. Gorham (1984) observed that non-linear chair arrangements promoted the very types of student-centered approaches recommended for teaching adults. Yet what is found in the majority of classrooms, both preadult and adult, throughout the country? Row upon row of chairs or desks.

Good practice involves implementation of theory through specific skills such as the interpersonal communication skills investigated in this study. Training adult educators in core competencies integrating adult learning principles and interpersonal communication techniques would indeed change classroom dynamics. The student would become the true focus of the learning experience and his or her needs would drive the curriculum. This is the vision described by the leaders and innovators in adult education.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are several possible directions for follow-up research to this study.

Applied research, based in actual practice, to identify good procedures and recommend improvement, continues to be needed.

The real world intrudes when we present idealistic statements about all teachers of adults being trained in student-centered teaching techniques and interpersonal communication skills. Part-time teacher pay, the likelihood that teachers of adults are employed full-time elsewhere, and the lack of funds for training part-time teachers all mitigate against our ideal adult education program. Research into how adult and continuing education departments are providing skills training for part-time teachers would be welcome.

Another area for further consideration is how the interpersonal communication techniques would affect and be affected by group dynamics. If the teacher is modelling preferred communication techniques, to what extent will the actions be adopted by the group or individuals in the group?

This study concentrated on learning-related benefits of using interpersonal communication techniques. Another possible area of study could focus on teacher's feelings of competence before and after training in interpersonal communication techniques. Could it be that the greatest benefits of interpersonal communication skills will be for the teacher rather than the students? Could burn-out be prevented by providing teachers with these skills?

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